

Suttavada Foundation

Transcript Online Retreat

<https://youtu.be/DrGfHc62qQE>

Dhammatalk day 1: Effective Choice and Effective Application

Dhamma Talk on Right Intention (Effective Choice) and Right Effort (Effective Application). Effective Choice is the choice to be in a wholesome state, while Effective Application is the process in which mind roots out unwholesome states, brings to fruition wholesome states and maintains them. This will be shown through the process of what is known as the 6Rs, while using the Brahma Viharas as the object of one's meditation.

Understand what Effective Choice means in relation to making an intention for this retreat, and to learn how to apply the Four Right Applications to keep one's observation unified.

Suttas:

SN 45.8 (by Bhante Ananda <https://www.suttavada.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SN-V-45.8-Vibha%E1%B9%85ga-Sutta-Breaking-Down-the-Path.pdf>) and **SN 49.1-12** (by Ajahn Sujato <https://suttacentral.net/sn49-gangapeyyalavagga>)

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We will begin with reading the Vibhaṅga Sutta - Breaking Down the Path - and this is a translation by bhante Ananda.

Once in Sāvātthi,

[The Buddha]

“Righteous is this Eight-spoked path monks,

That I will explain and break down to you.

Listen carefully and apply your mind to what I will say.”

“Yes Bhante” replied the monks.

The Awakened One spoke thus:

What is this Righteous Eight-Spoked Path?

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It is here as follows:

Wise Understanding

Wise Attitude

Wise Speech

Wise Behavior

Wise Living

Wise Practice

Wise Awareness

Wise Meditation

Wise Understanding

What is this wise understanding?

That is:

Knowing what is unwholesome;

Knowing the increase of the unwholesome;

Knowing the release from the unwholesome;

Knowing the way to release the unwholesome.

This is called wise understanding.

Wise Attitude

What is wise attitude?

That is,

The attitude of contentment.

The attitude of non-anger.

The attitude of harmlessness.

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This is called wise attitude.

Wise Speech

And what is wise speech?

That is,

Abstaining from false speech,

Abstaining from spiteful speech,

Abstaining from unkind speech,

Abstaining from senseless talk.

This is called wise speech.

Wise Behavior

And what is wise behavior?

That is,

Abstaining from mistreating living beings,

Abstaining from taking what is not given

Abstaining from sexual misconduct.

This is called wise behavior.

Wise Living

What is wise living?

That is,

A righteous meditator abandons wrong modes of living

And shapes a life by right modes of living.

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This is called wise living.

Wise Practice

What is wise practice?

- (1) One generates the intention for the non-emergence of inexistent, unfavorable, unwholesome states of mind.
One endeavors with determination, strives and supports this with one's mind.
- (2) One generates the intention for the abandonment of existent, Unfavorable, unwholesome states of mind.
One endeavors with determination, strives and supports this with one's mind.
- (3) One generates the intention for the emergence of inexistent, Wholesome states of mind.
One endeavors with determination, Strives and supports this with one's mind.
- (4) One generates the intention for the persistence of already emerged wholesome states, For their non-confusion, growth, maturation, development and culmination.
One endeavors with determination, strives and supports this with one's mind.

This is called wise practice.

Wise Awareness

What is wise awareness?

- (1) One meditates, observing body as body,
Intent, fully aware and present,
Abandoning worldly desire and regret.
- (2) One meditates, observing feeling as feeling,
Intent, fully aware and present,
Abandoning worldly desire and regret.
- (3) One meditates, observing mind as mind,
Intent, fully aware and present,
Abandoning worldly desire and regret.
- (4) One meditates, observing Dhamma as Dhamma,
Intent, fully aware, present,

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Abandoning worldly desire and regret.

This is called wise awareness

Wise Meditation

What is wise meditation?

- (1) Disengaging oneself from the outward desire
and detaching oneself from unwholesome mental states,
Attended by thinking and imagination
With the joy and happiness born of mental detachment
One understands and abides in the first level of meditation.

- (2) With the calming of thinking and imagining,
With inner tranquilization,
With the mind becoming unified,
Unattended by thinking and imagination
With joy and happiness born of samādhi,
One understands and dwells in the second level of meditation.

- (3) One abides in bliss, unclenching, balanced,
Present and fully comprehending,
Experiencing happiness within one's body
That which the awakened ones describe as:
"Steady presence of mind."
"This is a pleasant abiding"
One understands and abides in the third level of meditation.

- (4) Leaving behind the notions of happiness and unhappiness.
With the earlier settling of mental gladness and affliction,
With neither distress nor excitement,
Purified by unmoving presence,
One understands and abides in the fourth level of meditation.

This is called wise meditation.

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Now I'm going to read a second sutta, which is translated by bhante Sujato. This is from the Samyutta Nikaya 49.1-12. It is known as **Sloping East**.

At Sāvattḥī.

There the Buddha said:

“Bhikkhus, there are these four right efforts. What four?”

It's when a bhikkhu generates enthusiasm, tries, makes an effort, exerts the mind, and strives so that bad, unskillful qualities don't arise.

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that bad, unskillful qualities that have arisen are given up.

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that skillful qualities arise.

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that skillful qualities that have arisen remain, are not lost, but increase, mature, and are completed by development.

These are the four right efforts.

The Ganges river slants, slopes, and inclines to the east. In the same way, a bhikkhu who develops and cultivates the four right efforts slants, slopes, and inclines to Nibbana.

And how does a bhikkhu who develops the four right efforts slant, slope, and incline to Nibbana?

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that bad, unskillful qualities don't arise.

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that bad, unskillful qualities that have arisen are given up.

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that skillful qualities arise.

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that skillful qualities that have arisen remain, are not lost, but increase, mature, and are completed by development.

That's how a bhikkhu who develops and cultivates the four right efforts slants, slopes, and inclines to Nibbana.”

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So, for today the theme is Right Intention - or Effective Choice, as I like to call it - and Effective Application, or what is traditionally known as Right Effort.

Let's start with Effective Choice. Effective Choice is the choice to be in a wholesome state of mind. It's the choice to let go of unwholesome states of mind. And it's the choice to apply one's mind towards Nibbana.

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The unwholesome and the wholesome states of mind that arise, are to be divided into two: by first preventing the unwholesome, then abandoning whatever has arisen in the way of the unwholesome. And then generating, or bringing up, the wholesome, and maintaining that. These four make up what is Effective Application.

And how is this done? It's done within the meditation if you are doing a particular process like, for example, the 6R's. You do it in a way that you first stay with your object of meditation. In this case it might be one of the Brahma Viharas, it might be Metta, it might be Karuna, it might be Mudita, or it might be Upekkha. In other words, it might be Loving-kindness, Compassion, Empathetic Joy or Equanimity. Or it might even be the tranquil mind itself, once you attain it at a higher state of meditation.

The meditation, when you are doing it, is essentially two things:

Observing the wholesome state of mind, in other words the Brahma Vihara that you have generated through the practice. You just observe it within one's mind. You observe how it flows out from you, if you are radiating it in all directions. Or how it flows to your spiritual friend, if you choose to do it that way. That is the first aspect of the meditation.

The second is the process of using Right Effort to make sure that your mind is not distracted. And that is the use of what is known as Mindfulness.

Mindfulness has been used as a word a lot nowadays, and it means a lot of things to a lot of different people. But if you go back to the root word of Mindfulness, from the Pali, which is *Sati*, and you also look at the Sanskrit version of that, which is *smṛti*, it means essentially memory. Or to recollect. Or to remember. So, you are using Mindfulness in this way, which is to say, you are making sure that the attention that you have on your object or on the Brahma Vihara, or whatever it might be doing the meditation, is; being there, it's not being distracted. In other words, Mindfulness is the ability to keep one's observation, to keep one's attention rooted in reality, on the Brahma Vihara, on the feeling that you have generated, the wholesome feeling that you have generated. And the exercise of using Mindfulness is essentially using the Four Right Efforts. Which means you have noticed if you have become distracted, that you *have* become distracted. You prevent any further distractions from coming into mind, once recognizing you were distracted. You then abandon or Release your attention from the unwholesome state, or from the distraction that takes you away from the meditation.

Once you have taken your attention away from the distraction, you come to Relaxing any tension that might be there in the body. You are Relaxing the craving, letting go of the craving. By letting go you are practicing the Effective Choice, meaning you are practicing, in that moment, letting go of craving and letting go of the unwholesome states that have arisen. So, by Relaxing any kind of subtle tension that might arise in the mind and in the body as a reaction to having this distracted mind, you then come to a wholesome object, or a wholesome state of mind. And you generate that through the help of a Smile. You've already begun your meditation by having a little Buddha smile on your mouth or, as well,

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having a smile in the eyes and in the mind, essentially having a relaxed mind, and just allowing that Smile to carry forward the wholesome quality of mind. Having done this, you then come back to your meditation, you come back to the wholesome quality of mind. By doing this you have now first brought up the wholesome quality through your Smile, if that helps, and then come into the wholesome quality of Feeling that you use as your vehicle of meditation. By doing so you keep maintaining your attention on that vehicle of meditation, which is that wholesome quality of mind. Then you Repeat any time you become distracted. You Repeat the entire process every time other unwholesome qualities of mind start to arise.

Within Right Effort, or Effective Application, you can see that you are actually practicing Effective Choice as well. And when you do this in the meditation, it creates a feedback loop. Which means, the more you are able to abandon and let go of unwholesome states of mind, and the more you are able to bring up wholesome states of mind, the more you're able to do this in choices that are given to you in every moment of your daily living. And by doing that in the meditation, you are reconditioning the mind to be able to be more present. Which means it is becoming more aware of what is happening and what choices are presented to it. So, it is a reaction versus response. Meaning, in a reaction it's almost reflexive; the mind, if it has been used to reacting in a certain way which might be unwholesome, will immediately go towards the unwholesome choice in every given moment. But as you continue with the practice in meditation, it will start to become more apparent to you where you are able to take a pause in the choices that come, and you are able to respond with wisdom. You are able to respond from one of the Brahma Viharas, according to the situation. If the situation requires to come at it with Loving-kindness or Compassion, Joy or Equanimity, you are able to do that because you have trained your mind, you have conditioned your mind within the meditation.

And as I said, this is a feedback loop, which means that when you are able to do this in the meditation, you are able to do this in daily life. And the more you are able to be more wholesome in daily life, it has an immediate effect on the mind, because mind becomes more clarified, more purified by these wholesome actions that you take. That come from the Effective Choice, of letting go of the unwholesome, and cultivating the wholesome. Cultivating an attitude of harmlessness, cultivating an attitude of sloping or slanting towards seclusion, towards Nibbana. And then, as you are able to do this more in daily living by being able to have that wholesome state of mind in your daily practice, in your daily living, by making the Effective Choice - of letting go of the unwholesome, cultivating the wholesome and having mind slant towards Nibbana - you are creating a stable, clear foundation for your next meditation session.

Every time you do this, you create a mind that is basically ready for the meditation, allowing the mind to go even deeper in the meditation. Therefore, after you come out from that meditation, you are then able to act according to the wholesome choices, act according to the Effective Choice. The Effective Application comes into play not only in

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meditation, but also when you are presented with these choices. When you are presented whether coming into a situation with a wholesome mindset or an unwholesome mindset. And when you find that if a situation is inherently unwholesome, and tries to bring out an unwholesome quality of mind through that choice, you become aware, take a pause, and use the Four Effective Applications to be able to come at it from a wholesome standpoint. Which means that if somebody, for example, were to try to bring out anger from you and you start to realize and recognize that there is an ignition of anger coming out; you prevent it by recognizing and seeing in that moment that anger is arising, and you let go of it and then you replace it with a loving and kind attitude. So, what that means is, when you see the anger arising for example, you are now preventing that anger from further arising. Because it's in the unawareness, in the lack of Mindfulness, that you allow, or that you are unable to have that anger be under control, and therefore be let go of. In that unawareness, because of that lack of Mindfulness, the anger will just flow out. But if you do have the Mindfulness, if you do have the awareness, you will be able to know with your attention that there is anger starting to arise, and then let go of that anger, let go of that inkling of anger. By doing that you are preventing the anger and abandoning it. Then you come into a loving and kind attitude, you bring it up by understanding that the situation for example, may require a loving and kind attitude, a patient attitude. You bring that up and maintain that, and therefore you make the Effective Choice of being in a state of wholesomeness, of being in an attitude of harmlessness. And therefore start cultivating a mind that is ripe for Nibbana. So, it's essential to see that feedback loop and by understanding it, it motivates the mind to not only have this kind of an Effective Application process and Effective Choice process within the meditation, but also in daily life.

Question Student:

The Effective Choice in daily life and at the start of the meditation; do I continue to bring it up consciously? I ask this because sometimes if I start a meditation sitting, I literally just sit and see what is arising, rather than bringing up the wholesome qualities of mind. The reason I'm doing that, is because then my mind is actually pretty tranquil already. I see things arising, I Relax them and pretty quickly, my mind becomes collected. At the same time, I also recall that, when I consciously bring up a wholesome quality of mind – metta is typically what I do – it moves to the first jhana almost instantly. I'm trying to see if it is dependent on the situation or the context, or is it best to start up with Effective Choice, bringing up the Brahma Vihara – the metta – and then move to the clear mind situation?

Answer Teacher:

From what you are describing, essentially in the first case, what you are doing is actually having the Effective Observation, or Right Mindfulness. Which means you are aware of

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body as body, aware of sensations as sensations, aware of mind as mind, and aware of phenomena as phenomena. So you are just watching where the mind is in that moment. That too is actually Effective Choice, because it is in line with Right Mindfulness. It's in line with the Noble Eightfold Path, because of that Right Mindfulness.

Once you are aware what that present situation is, in other words you're aware if the mind is tranquil, or if it's not tranquil. If it's agitated or if it is at ease. If it is upset or at peace. This is really practicing one aspect of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in that regard. So you can start that way and once you are aware of where your mind is presently, if it is for example already tranquil, you then still bring up a wholesome quality, so that you can get into the first jhana.

But once you are in the first jhana, you let go of any of the Factors, that come into play from the first jhana. You don't allow the mind to be distracted by the occurrence of the first jhana, and stay with the feeling. Because as you stay with the feeling, it will evolve and transform on its own, without your pushing, let's say. Or without any kind of poking or prodding. As long as you keep observing, you will see that it keeps changing.

So as I mentioned, your steps that you do in the meditation are essentially; once you bring up the feeling, once you are aware where your mind is at the beginning of the meditation, then accordingly if you need to 6R, or if you need to use the Four Right Efforts – the Four Effective Applications – you let go of any unwholesome states that are possibly there, if they are. Then bring up the metta in your case, and then continue on with the jhana. Mindful of what is happening in terms of the occurrence of the first, second, third jhana and so on. But still keeping your attention – which is the use of Mindfulness -, making sure through observation that you are keeping your mind with that feeling, you are not allowing it to get distracted by the factors of the jhana. And if you are, just use the Effective Application to come back.

Question:

Thank you. Once you are in the first jhana and moving to the second jhana where verbal Formations are starting to decline, at that point in time are you also being more relaxed about the intentions? About the continuation of the bringing up of the Brahma Vihara? Because then it has started, it's on the journey, if you will, as long as you don't get distracted. And then you just continue to observe the feeling which is there. And if you get distracted, you 6R and you come back to the object of meditation.

Answer:

That's correct. Which means that in the second jhana, there is the abandoning of the thinking aspect, the verbalizing and examining aspect of the mind. So, the intention, as you just mentioned, is to bring up, for example, metta. Once that has been generated, with whatever way you do it, the intention is let go of. Because now that the metta is free-flowing, you are effectively in the second jhana. Now you've let go of the

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verbalization, if you use verbalization, or let go of the imagining if you use that, to bring up the wholesome state of metta. And then you let go of it, and then allow that to just free-flow. And I always liken it to watching a movie; just sit back, enjoy, have your popcorn and watch the metta continue.

Question:

The other thing which people often ask about meditation, is the movement of the body. In the sense that, one is starting the meditation practice and you feel an itch, or a knee starts to hurt, or you feel you want to move your hand. And then the response is; but actually all of these things are arising in your mind, and it's the intention that's going to move your body. So, you should sit as still as the Buddha is sitting, meaning no movement at all, literally at all. Is that also your understanding?

Answer:

That is also the understanding that I have. If you do feel an itch for example, or an ache in the body, some kind of discomfort, it arose out of your control. Which means that you didn't cause the itch, it was just caused by a series of causes and conditions. You use the Effective Observation, or Right Mindfulness, to be aware that there is itchiness in the body now. You let go of it, you let go of your attention to it. If you continue to be aware of the itchiness and allow your attention to rest on it, you are not only distracted and therefore no longer on the object or on the vehicle of your meditation – metta – but you are also feeding that itch to grow with that attention. What you need to do then is, for example using the 6R process as one might understand it, or the Four Effective Applications. By doing that, it might require a few times of using that process, but every time you do it, the attention will fade away from the itch and come back to its object, to its vehicle of meditation. The itch might appear again, so you do the same thing and then come back to the metta. It might happen one more time, it might happen a few more times, but instead of fighting it [smiles], instead of allowing your mind to become so affected through that attention of staying with that itch, allow it to be there, let go of it and come back. Eventually, at a certain point, the itch will no longer be noticeable, and you will be with your vehicle of meditation.

When it comes to discomfort in the body, or let's say there is some kind of tension in the body – some people describe that as meditation pain – after sitting for quite some time, what you do there is also the same kind of application as you do with the itch. But there is another kind of discomfort that is tension in the body and tension in the mind. Which means that perhaps you are trying too hard, by trying to push the mind to stay with metta, to stay with the feeling, rather than sitting back and observing. If you notice there is tension, first see whether you are pushing too much. See whether you are trying to make something happen, which is actually a form of craving. You are trying to change the present situation, by forcing something upon it which is not there. Instead of accepting

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what is the reality of the situation, and letting go of the need to control it. Based on that, if there is such a tension arising, you use the Effective Application – the 6R process – and let go of it and then come back to the metta. And if there is meditation pain, likewise, you do the same thing.

Question:

The last question is related to this; in my past, in this life, I had quite some craving in terms of a relationship that I used to have. It has taken me quite some time and I've been able to let the Formations go and the craving, and in my daily living it's hardly noticeable, it doesn't come up. At the same time, sometimes in my dreams or during the night, it still comes up. This is a quite interesting situation, because then I'm not completely mindful in my dream so I can let it go. Sometimes I feel like I'm in the Perception nor non Perception, I'm in the middle and I'm able to let it go. But it confuses me sometimes that it is actually coming up in my dreams, and it is not coming up in my waking life. Is there any way I can also release it in my sleep?

Answer:

You can try to be a little more lucid in dreaming. It might be difficult at first, but it's a process in which you actually use the Effective Application within the dreaming process. If you are able to be so mindful to the point that you become aware of the dreams that you're having, which may become, let's say, rooted in some form of craving, you can let that go as well.

And the other way to do it is, if you remember that you had that dream, perhaps upon waking up in the morning, or later on, you can have the intention of letting that go as well, through Effective Application. So, even if it does not appear in your meditation, but in your dream state, you can – to reiterate – if you have the mindfulness to be able to let go, within that dream. Or after having remembered what is in that dream, using your retrospective view so to speak, you can then let go of it. It's the same process as when you are in Neither Perception nor non Perception – in the eighth jhana – where one is not fully aware of the contents of the mind in that particular jhana, or state of mind. But upon having come out of it, spends a few minutes through retrospective looking back at what was occurring and then using the 6R process, so using the Effective Application to let go of those thoughts or ideas, concepts, or Formations.

Question:

The thing is, in my dream I am mindful to the sense I know I am dreaming, I know this is coming up and I know I should be letting it go. However, my mindfulness is not as strong and do the last step. So that's what's happening in my mind.

Answer:

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Yes, it's just a matter of being able to take that one step. If you are not able to, you will still recollect it upon waking up. And at that point of time it will be easier for you to let go of it.